

The Electric Mercury

U.S. Army Medical Command Electronic News Summary, July 2003

**For more on these and other important stories, see July 2003 printed issue of The Mercury.
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Iraqi Freedom shows value of early care

Army's new doctrine of surgery far forward and rapid evacuation of casualties was validated during Operation Iraqi Freedom, BG George Weightman tells Association of the United States Army symposium. Weightman, who led medical forces in the theater, said forward surgical teams, the 91 Whiskeys (the new medic specialty that stresses trauma training) and body armor saved lives. Predeployment screening and preventive-medicine teams kept disease casualties low. Chemical-protection DEPMEDS gear let medics work without cumbersome protective suits and kept out sand. Lessons learned include a need for pediatric resources to treat children injured in fighting; a need for more sick-call supplies; and the risk of damage in prepositioned medical stocks. (With photos.)

Health assessments should identify ills of returning soldiers

Expanded health assessments for soldiers returning from deployments include a more comprehensive medical form; face-to-face assessments by trained health-care providers; blood samples within 30 days; telephone "help-lines" for providers, patients and families; a clinical practice guideline for providers on how to do post-deployment care; long-term monitoring and quality assurance; World Wide Web information to keep providers, soldiers and families informed; careful population health surveillance; and research. These steps are part of a "total force health-protection program" including increased environmental surveillance to spot health threats in-theater; electronic medical record keeping; and improved data on where units are located throughout deployment.

FDA approves drug to counter nerve agent

Pyridostigmine bromide is now FDA-approved as a pretreatment against the effects of soman, or GD, a highly lethal nerve agent. First approved by the FDA as a treatment for myasthenia gravis, a neuromuscular disease, PB works by temporarily binding to the same enzyme (needed for muscles) that soman permanently attaches itself to.

AUSA symposium focuses on terrorism

More than 1,200 people attend this year's Association of the United States Army Medical Symposium, relates Army Surgeon General/MEDCOM Commander LTG James B. Peake in his monthly column. Theme is "The Global War On Terrorism." Numerous high-ranking speakers address participants, who also attend "roll-up-your-sleeves" sessions that deal with how the AMEDD does business.

Other important stories in this month's edition of the *Mercury* include:

- Not meeting vision standards is the biggest physical disqualifier for becoming an Army aviator. Currently, aviation hopefuls who undergo refractive surgery to correct their eyesight are prohibited from flying. However, an ongoing study on refractive eye surgery allows some aspiring aviators to get medical waivers for flight school.
- Walter Reed Army Medical Center set a national precedent, earning six of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations' newest certifications, breaking the previous record of four. Programs evaluated in March that received the certification are Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder, Congestive Heart Failure, Pediatric Asthma, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Risk Reduction and Women's Health.
- TRICARE is much improved, but some beneficiaries still have difficulty understanding and accessing the system, says the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS).
- CPT Hengmo McCall, head nurse of the Wiesbaden, Germany, Army Health Clinic, receives Federal Asian/Pacific American Council Military Meritorious Service Award.
- CPT Kevin Burnham, Fort Jackson, S.C., MEDDAC, receives The Surgeon General's 2003 Physician Assistant of the Year Award for his work during 2002 with U.S. Army Forces Central Command in Qatar.
- A special 4-page chapter concludes the *Mercury*'s three-year "Medics of the Coldest War" series about Army Medicine in the Korean War.
- Photos: Afghan comforts 8-year-old daughter enroute to medical facility on 126th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) medevac helicopter; flight surgeon and former Army aviator MAJ George von Hilsheimer prepares to fly Apache helicopter of the 3rd Battalion, 229th Aviation Regiment (Attack), in Afghanistan.
- Commentary: "Transplant recipients face vaccine hazard," by Fran McGregor, a nurse and kidney recipient, warns that even good vaccines may harm immunosuppressed individuals, so great care must be exercised by inoculators and inoculated persons; "Overstuffed e-mails can cause bandwidth famine," by LTG Peter Cuvillo, Chief Information Officer of the Army, urges Army people not to overload Army e-mail channels with large files and offers an efficient alternative.
- Avoiding accidents in the home, at the workplace and on the road is one of the most important lifesaving measures people can take, writes U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine expert Carlla E. Jones.
- MEDCOM customer-service consultant Mike Meines offers the fifth in his series of articles about the customer-service ethic.